

PRESS RELEASE

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CONYERS PRAISES 9/11 BILL

Rep. John Conyers, Jr. issued the following statement today regarding S.2845, "The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Report of 2004":

"Earlier this year, the 9-11 Commission reached across the partisan divide and came up with a unanimous agreement. Ten members, five Democrats and five Republicans, held countless hearings and issued a well-written report with well-reasoned recommendations.

To the disappointment of partisans, the Commission refused to divert itself with election-year political considerations, declining to cast blame on this Administration or its predecessors. The Senate, almost evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, followed the Commission's example by taking up a bipartisan bill, authored by Senators McCain, Lieberman and Collins.

Today, at last, the House has seen fit to follow this fine example. The product we have before us is the product of extensive negotiations, that included all parties Democrats and Republicans.

My Democratic colleagues on the conference deserve credit for their determination and hard work. I want to offer praise for the work of Ranking Member Harman and her staff. They have been steadfast.

I want to offer particular praise across the aisle to my Republican colleagues who have worked so hard on this bill: my colleague from Michigan, Chairman Hoekstra, Mr. Shays and the Speaker of the House and his Chief of Staff.

Like any product of compromise, this bill falls far short of what any of us would consider perfect. Some of my Republican colleagues wanted extraneous immigration provisions that would penalize victims of torture and asylum seekers. Those are not in this bill. Others did not want a board to oversee violations of privacy and civil liberties. That is in the bill, albeit in significantly weakened form.

I did not want any additions to the Patriot Act. One provision, on material support for alleged terrorist organizations, is in the bill. Like other provisions of the Patriot Act, it sunsets in two years.

For both sides, there will be time for oversight of the provisions they did not want. I predict the next Congress will see a substantial debate about the Patriot Act, what should be renewed in it and what should be allowed to expire.

But today, we have a product that keeps faith with the 9-11 Commission and the 9-11 families that worked so hard to make this legislation happen.

First and foremost, this bill represents a truly comprehensive 9-11 reform bill. Second, the approach outlined in the substitute has been endorsed by members of the 9/11 Commission and the family members of the 9-11 victims. Third, the substitute includes strong budgetary authority for the newly created National Intelligence Director, and targets terrorist traveling, as recommended by the 9/11 Commission.

The choice today is clear. We can either choose the status quo – a broken system of competing intelligence bottlenecks or a positive and promising reform. I urge my colleagues to vote for this bill. Our number one priority is to protect the American people and this bill is a step in the right direction."